



## Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS Gateway Communities

Gateway communities serve an important role in helping to provide support services in the Yosemite region. From restaurants to lodging facilities, grocery stores to gift shops, medical clinics to automotive service, local businesses provide services for visitors to the area, but park employees and local residents as well. Under the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS user capacity alternatives, gateway communities may experience the ripple effects of various management actions.

All of the action alternatives allow for the current level of use, and therefore little change would be noticed in the short term. On peak days, when traffic congestion and parking in the most popular portions of the river corridor reach unacceptable levels, visitors may be temporarily redirected to other areas of the park. When visitors are temporarily diverted from their desired destination, they may visit other areas in Yosemite, or even to spend more time in nearby gateway communities before coming to the park. Park management would work closely with local communities to determine how best to manage use during those few peak days each year when visitors may be temporarily diverted from their preferred destination in the park.

### Alternative 2: Interim Limits with VERP Monitoring

Under the preferred alternative, a temporary freeze on most visitor facilities within the corridor would be implemented. This freeze is intended to be in place until the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) user capacity program has been refined and is fully implemented. Included in these interim limits is a freeze on the number of buses entering the river corridor. The plan established limits on bus numbers—commercial tour buses, school and church buses, and others bus services—due to the limited number of parking facilities available. The interim limit on buses was based on the historic peak reached in 1996. Since then, bus traffic has been reduced substantially from those levels, therefore, the plan allows for somewhat of an increase over what is currently experienced today.

Key to implementing this interim limit on buses, park management would need to better manage the timing and distribution of buses throughout the peak days to reduce congestion in parking areas and roadways. With a limited number of parking spaces available for buses, park management would work with the commercial tour bus operations and local communities to determine how best to manage bus access to allow a quality experience for the visitors arriving by bus and to reduce traffic and safety hazards associated with congestion.

Limits established on visitor and commercial tour bus levels are unlikely to result in any short-term change. In the longer term, growth during the peak season may be restricted, but there could continue to be some growth in the shoulder season.

### Alternatives 3 & 4: Quotas with VERP Monitoring

Alternatives 3 and 4 in the Draft Revised Merced River Plan SEIS adopt visitor quotas in addition to a VERP monitoring process. These daily and annual quotas are based on existing use levels, but could constrain future growth in visitor levels. The daily and yearly visitor quotas would allow for very little growth from current peak levels, but would allow for some growth in the shoulder seasons. These quotas would limit the number of people in each corridor segment (Alt. 3) or each management zone (Alt. 4). Since the majority of the river corridor is in wilderness areas, (where visitor levels are already constrained under wilderness trailhead quotas) these quotas would mostly affect areas near Yosemite Valley and Wawona. If segment or management zone quotas are exceeded, park management would need to divert people away from these areas. This could be done through temporary restrictions and diversions inside park gates, or could be avoided by implementing a reservation system for those few peak days each year when conditions warrant it. This could result in fewer California regional residents being able to make spontaneous trips into popular areas during the peak period. Since visitors from further away typically make their plans to visit Yosemite in advance, the measures would not likely affect them.